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**Subject:** STATEMENT FROM SOCIAL ACTION LINKING TOGETHER (SALT) and SAINT JOHN NEUMANN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE FAIRFAX COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES COUNCIL ON THE FY 2015 ADVERTISED BUDGET PLAN  
**Date:** March 7, 2014 at 1:59 PM  
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**INPUT FROM SOCIAL ACTION LINKING TOGETHER (SALT) and SAINT JOHN NEUMANN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE FAIRFAX COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES COUNCIL ON THE FY 2015 ADVERTISED BUDGET PLAN**

**1. SUMMARY OF NEED:** Fairfax County has an unacceptable number of its citizens that are literally homeless —1,350, of which 33 percent were under the age of 18, according to the 2013 Point-in-Time count conducted in January 2013. Almost 60 percent—58%--of adults in homeless families were employed. Perhaps the most depressing statistic is this one:

57 percent (341 people) of single adults who were homeless suffered from serious mental illness and/or substance abuse.

The unfortunate predicament in which some of our homeless neighbors find themselves surely requires more than providing temporary shelter. The statistics maintained on the [fairfaxcounty.gov](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov) web site provides us with an initial understanding of the problem that afflicts not only the homeless but touches the lives of all of us living in the community. Statistics, however, do not and cannot tell the whole story. As the web site notes, "**Homelessness Hurts Us Too:** Homelessness doesn't just hurt families. It also affects us, with social and economic costs to our community." How? (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/real-cost-homelessness.htm>)

**Increased Public Costs for Medical Care:**

- Hospital bills are \$2,414 more for people who are homeless. This is because they stay in the hospital for four days longer on average, says a *New England Journal of Medicine* study.
- Children who are homeless are sick and go to the emergency room more often than other children.<sup>2</sup> They also are:
  - ✓ Twice as many ear infections.
  - ✓ Four times as many asthma attacks.
  - ✓ Five times more stomach problems.

- ✓ Six times as many speech problems.
- ✓ Twice as many hospitalizations

#### **Increased Public Costs for Education**

- Children who are homeless are more likely to have lower academic achievement. They are:
  - ✓ Four times as likely to have developmental delays.
  - ✓ Twice as likely to have learning disabilities.
  - ✓ Twice as likely to repeat a grade, most often due to frequent absences and moves to new schools

Please refer to the web site for the following statistics:

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/homelessness-in-our-community.htm>

**The majority of the homeless are families and many work full time.** The majority of people without homes in our community are children and working families:

- Close to 60 percent of homeless persons are in families.
- More than 75 percent of children in homeless families are under the age of 11.
- Nearly 60 percent adults in homeless families work.

**We are home to the second largest number of people without homes.** The second largest number of people who are homeless in our region live in the Fairfax-Falls Church community. Only in Washington, D.C., are there more people without homes.

**Lack of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness.** Low incomes (i.e., the failure of employers to pay a living wage) and expensive housing are the main reasons for homelessness in our community. It is impossible to pay for an apartment when earning minimum wage — even if someone work 24 hours per day, 7 days a week:

- Monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,134.
- A family must earn \$22.25 an hour to afford a one-bedroom apartment.
- 82 percent of homeless families earn less than \$14.24 an hour.

**Violence against women and poor health are also reasons.** The Point-in-Time survey on homelessness says:

- Close to 45 percent of persons in families are homeless due to incidents of domestic violence.
- Close to 65 percent of single individuals who are homeless suffer from serious



mental illness and/or substance abuse, and many have chronic health problems and/or physical disabilities.

The folks at FACETS also provide us with these disturbing statistics: In FY12, nearly 2,000 people accessed this service by participating in case management and receiving supplies from their emergency pantry. Adults also accessed client computers and phones to help with their employment and housing searches. Every day of the year, FACETS, in partnership with area faith communities (over 35 faith communities involving over 1,000 volunteers), offers a [Hot Meals Program](http://facetscares.org/programs/emergency-services/) to people who are homeless (<http://facetscares.org/programs/emergency-services/>).

FACETS volunteers participating through their faith communities prepare and serve a hot, nutritious meal to an average of 88 people each day, or approximately 37,000 each year. These meals are served to families and individuals who are homeless, living in and around four sites along Lee Highway in Fairfax (<http://facetscares.org/programs/hot-meals/>).

**2. RECOMMENDATION:** Of course, no single recommendation can address this issue of ending and preventing homelessness, but Fairfax County has already made a good start with the "**Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness**" (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/community-plan.htm>).

The "Housing First" approach appears to be a correct course of action, and the strategy that SALT is focusing on with this statement is Strategy #2 of the Community Plan referenced: "Preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing to prevent or remedy homelessness" ([http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/fairfax\\_strategy\\_end\\_homelessness.pdf](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/homeless/fairfax_strategy_end_homelessness.pdf)).

One way for Fairfax County to take up this strategy is to support **RESIDENTIAL STUDIO UNITS (RSU)**. This would provide one reasonable approach to making housing available and more affordable, but obviously not the only approach, and it is not one that will work for all low-income citizens. Why not consider doing this?

Fairfax County, according to U. S. Census information (2011) has 1,361 efficiency rental units, with a vacancy rate of 3.8%, and an average monthly rent of \$1,010. With a median income of \$105,797 per household, 8.4% of these households have incomes of under \$25,000. Housing prices in the past years have made housing in Fairfax County too expensive for many residents with low incomes. The RSU option could provide affordable housing for those working in service jobs, young workers, graduate students, retirees who need to downsize, and the disabled.

The Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance makes a compelling argument for this approach: "We live in one of the wealthiest counties in America—and simply we do not have affordable, safe and community based housing for our

simply we do not have affordable, safe and community based housing for our residents who are single parents, returning veterans, young couples, people with disabilities, entry level workers—or even our fireman, policeman, caregivers and teachers. The lack of affordable housing often times results in people spending 30% or more of income on transportation; overcrowding in 'traditional homes and neighborhoods'; and homelessness" (<http://www.nvaha.org>).

### 3. ANTICIPATED OR EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES/RESULT OF APPROACH RECOMMENDED

The question to be addressed should be: What is the cost of not doing this? Some of the costs are noted on page one of this statement: **Increased Public Costs for Medical Care and Increased Public Costs for Education**. But the financial component is only one dimension to consider, and perhaps it is the most insignificant one. Such an approach—i.e., considering only the financial impact-- does not measure the personal damage suffered by those individuals (many of whom are children and the working poor) oppressed by poverty and homelessness, individuals whose development, in some cases, will likely be impeded and, in other instances, crushed, i.e., made impossible, because we did little or nothing to help lift them up so that they may have the opportunity to flourish by ensuring housing security.

A perspective to consider when evaluating initiatives that are important to the poor and vulnerable in our community is one that has been handed down from some ancient faith traditions: the justice of a society can be measured by how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring and being treated. SALT advocates believe that this measure continues to be a valid one for evaluating the justice of a community, and it trusts that the people of our community prefer to be recognized for their justice and concern for the poor and most vulnerable, making this their legacy for future generations rather than to leave a less noble legacy for posterity.

SALT believes decent, safe, and affordable housing is a human right. We support the right to private property, but we hold that communities and the government have an obligation to ensure the housing needs of all are met, especially poor and vulnerable people and their families. At a time when homelessness is the plight of so many in our community and when many workers' wages are stagnant and living expenses are rising, it is important to ensure housing security.

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